

Eleanor Cade Busby

Hearing on Responding to Long-Term Unemployment

Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen;

Unemployment is like a whirlpool, multifaceted and nearly impossible to escape. We, the Unemployed suffer from lack of access to health care, a harsh climate, long-standing cultural traditions & indifference. All of these factors link together to create a situation from which recovery in this work economy is a long and difficult road.

Constantly rising unemployment has driven unprecedented requests for help with emergency food, fuel, housing, medical and even warm clothing. For those who were already struggling before the economy plummeted, the situation has gone from bad to worse: national reports show a 67% in households experiencing “very low food security” in other words: outright hunger. A single person receiving unemployment is over income for food assistance or medical assistance in Maine.

Hunger hurts. All of us have experienced hunger at one time or another. We’ve wanted something salty or a bedtime snack had a rumbling feeling to remind us to eat. There is a huge difference between a growly stomach and outright hunger. I have been in many homes in our area where the outside looks just fine, but inside the heat is set at 50, and the bags I bring from the market are the only, literally the only foodstuffs in that house. These are not people who are lazy. These are not people who have no work ethic, or in large majority this year, people who have EVER dreamed they would need to file for unemployment or ask for any help at all. Long term unemployment has depleted savings, and retirement funds, if they were there at all are used up at prohibitive penalties to survive now.

Fear walks hand in hand with loss of income, with poverty and with hunger and cold. People who once felt important to the world are feeling alone and that they are failing as human beings and parents because they simply cannot provide adequate food, heat, medical care and shelter.

The choices made every day by people you pass on the street would shock you. Cheap foods, carbohydrates, snack foods, empty calorie foods, what we call junk foods, fill up bellies faster. When a person has to walk by the fresh fruit because oranges are 1.00 a piece and go to the cheaper ‘fruit drinks’ for sheer volume, the necessity becomes a vicious circle. Lifelong consequences result. Children and Elders are more likely to experience colds, infections, more hospitalizations, fatigue, weakened immunity, and for children, behavioral difficulties, and impaired performance in school, socially, academically and athletically. Hunger does not discriminate; the neighbors who are struggling with this would shock you because you sit next to them in church and even in this very room.

Every day the unemployed face difficult choices. These choices erode dignity, lessen energy, increase depression and endanger lives when medicines are stretched out, pills cut in half, heating and electric bills left unpaid just to buy anything to eat at all.

As a Volunteer Representative of the Salvation Army I hear many requests from people who go so their kids can eat. We often cannot financial aid, because none of local agencies have resources enough to mitigate these problems.

I have been unemployed since October of 2009. The company I worked for closed for good. I am a single woman 57 years old and a Cancer survivor since last September. I get the maximum benefit provided by law plus a \$25.00 stimulus extra each week until December. With what I get from UEC I am over income for Food assistance and Medical coverage from the State of Maine. One prescription that I need to live costs \$250.00 per month. The others total around \$200.00 monthly. I pay full rent, car insurance and electricity/ fuel bills. With all this budgeted to the last dime? I have about \$17.00 a week for food, if I don't need to buy gas. This already requires shuffling things around.

I spend at least 4 hours every day looking for work, in person, online and researching. We all want to work, all of us. I am granted interviews once in awhile, but most jobs are filled from within. It is discouraging on many levels. As a woman nearing 60, it is quite clear that many places think I can't do the jobs or won't stay long enough to make training worthwhile. The economy may not turn around in time for me.

Please extend unemployment. Volunteer organizations are stretched to the limit, people are already on the verge of giving up, and families are in crisis as they lose their homes and families. The stress is already beyond words, please don't make this worse. Literally, it could cost lives.